

Proposed Residential Development at Brackens Ridge, Arrowtown South

Application for Referral to an Expert Consenting Panel

Urban Design Assessment



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Cover image: Aerial from QLDC GIS website

1 Introduction

- 1.1 RA Skidmore Urban Design Ltd. has been requested by JCarter Planning Ltd., on behalf of Mt Soho Trust, to provide urban design advice in relation to a proposed residential subdivision and land-use consent to develop Brackens Ridge, a site located adjacent to the southern edge of the Arrowtown township.
- 1.2 It is proposed to progress the project through the COVID-19 Recovery (Fast-track Consenting) Act 2020 process and the purpose of this report is to accompany the request to the Minister for the Environment to use this process.
- 1.3 In 2009 I was engaged by Mt Soho Trust to provide urban design advice in relation to a proposed Plan Change to rezone an area, including the subject land (the “Site”), for residential use. At that time, I prepared the ‘Arrowtown Southern Extension – Urban Design Assessment’ (September 2009). The Plan Change request progressed through the Environment Court with the final outcome being a special zone being applied to the land: the ‘Arrowtown South’ zone which enables 17 rural lifestyle lots, with a minimum lot size of 1,500m² and an average of at least 4,000m².
- 1.4 I have visited the site and surrounding environs on numerous occasions, the most recent being the 28th March 2022.
- 1.5 The following report is structured in three sections. In the first, I provide an overview of key findings from my 2009 report. I then set out key features in the surrounding environment that have changed since that assessment was carried out. Finally, I draw conclusions about the appropriateness of the land to accommodate a residential expansion of the Arrowtown settlement as proposed¹.

2 2009 Urban Design Assessment

- 2.1 My 2009 Urban Design Assessment (the “UDA”) was guided by a number of statutory and non-statutory documents that were relevant at that time, including:
 - The Queenstown-Lakes District Partially Operative District Plan (2007);
 - The Growth Management Strategy for the Queenstown Lakes District (2007);
 - The NZ Urban Design Protocol;

¹ Concept masterplan by Baxter Design

- The Draft Queenstown Lakes District Urban Design Strategy (April 2009);
and
 - The Arrowtown Design Guidelines (2006).
- 2.2 Section 3 of the report set out an analysis of the urban structure of Arrowtown. The analysis identified: the historic origins of the settlement to service the gold mining activity in the area; the relationship of the settlement to its dramatic natural setting and the way this provides containment to the settlement; and the way the settlement has grown and evolved over time.
- 2.3 A summary of the analysis identified the key structuring elements of Arrowtown as being:
- Containment and visual connection to natural landforms, particularly Arrow River and the ranges to the north and east;
 - Golf course open spaces containing settlement to the south;
 - Heart of the settlement is the commercial centre focussed on Buckingham Street;
 - Main entry points to the settlement are from Malaghans Road (west), Arrowtown-Lake Hayes Road (southwest), and Centennial Avenue (southeast);
 - The 'old town' residential neighbourhoods have a built pattern that strongly reflects the identified 'Arrowtown character';
 - The roading pattern of the 'new town' departs from the connected grid network found in the 'old town'; and
 - Social infrastructure is concentrated in the commercial centre and 'old town' with the exception of the Primary School, located on Centennial Avenue.
- 2.4 Section 4 of the report provided a description of the Site and its surrounding context. Key features of the Site included: the undulating topography and location of the McDonnell escarpment and its relationship to a watercourse at its base; large mature trees located around existing dwellings to the south of the Site; heritage buildings including the Muter Farm homestead (Category 3 protection, Item 126) and the associated stone stable (see **Attachment 1**, Photographs 1 – 5).
- 2.5 This section also described the pattern of surrounding land use and development, including: the residential neighbourhood to the north; the Arrowtown Golf Course to the east and south; and a small cluster of established rural residential sites to the north of the Golf Course.

- 2.6 From a consideration of the existing urban structure and settlement pattern of Arrowtown, and the characteristics of the subject site, my assessment found that the area provides a logical extension to the settlement. Key reasons included:
- The adjoining golf courses provide a logical open space boundary to the settlement;
 - McDonnell Road and Centennial Avenue create clear boundaries and accessways into the site and the established town;
 - Development already extends along the terrace and McDonnell Road escarpment;
 - Appropriate development of the land has the potential to enhance the arrival experience when entering Arrowtown from the south via Centennial Avenue;
 - The undulating nature of the land provides the potential for the creation of a high amenity living environment; and
 - The opportunity exists to enhance the visual quality and amenity of the stream that runs through the area.
- 2.7 I concluded that the proposed plan change area would provide a suitable southern 'book-end' to the settlement of Arrowtown, creating a clear urban edge that is defined by adjoining open spaces and main street axes. I noted that the detailed provisions of the zone would be important in determining how that growth is accommodated in a manner that respects the visual amenity of the area and the character values that contribute to Arrowtown's distinct sense of place.
- 2.8 Section 5 of the report identified key character elements of Arrowtown, particularly in relation to: street configuration and character; vegetation; and the pattern of built development.
- 2.9 From the analysis set out in the preceding sections, Section 6 of the report identified a number of urban design principles for the Plan Change with recommendations about District Plan methods to achieve those principles. The urban design principles were:
- Create a distinctive entrance to Arrowtown that contributes to the collective character of the settlement;
 - Respect topography;
 - Capitalise on views to the surrounding landscape;
 - Enhance natural watercourse as a structuring element and amenity feature;
 - Create a high amenity public realm that reflects the character of Arrowtown;

- Provide good connectivity;
 - Create a strong vegetative framework; and
 - Enable building intensity, scale and form that provides good residential amenity and responds to key character features of Arrowtown.
- 2.10 The conclusion section of my report highlighted that Arrowtown is a small settlement that sits within a spectacular mountain setting. From its inception as a gold mining settlement, the town has evolved to meet the changing needs and preferences of its residents. Arrowtown is a distinctive place. In particular, the older core of the town exhibits a range of features that creates a distinctive character that is highly valued by both residents and visitors.
- 2.11 I concluded that, in terms of urban structure, the proposal to provide for limited expansion of the settlement to the south is appropriate. I considered the proposed Plan Change area to be well defined and contained by the surrounding open space features of golf courses. The area is well connected to the core of the settlement by Centennial Drive and McDonnell Road; and I noted the opportunity to improve the arrival experience when entering Arrowtown via Centennial Drive.
- 2.12 I also noted the opportunity to promote a sustainable pattern of development by:
- Providing a defined urban boundary;
 - Optimising urban resources;
 - Reinforcing the scale and character of development in the existing settlement;
 - Achieving cohesive, integrated urban areas; and
 - Mitigating the adverse effects of development.

3 Changes to the Context for Considering Proposal

- 3.1 In considering the potential southern expansion of Arrowtown, the Environment Court determined that the Urban Growth Boundary (“the UGB”) should move south, but only for a short distance along McDonnell Road. The Court determined that the remainder of the Arrowtown South area should provide a rural lifestyle density. The operative District Plan applies the Arrowtown South zone to the Site with an accompanying structure plan that limits the total number of dwellings to 17.
- 3.2 I remain of the opinion that the Site is well located to accommodate residential expansion of Arrowtown. Since 2009 and the Environment Court’s determination, there have been a number of changes to the planning context and the surrounding physical

environment that I consider lend further support to accommodating an increased density of residential activity on the Site.

- 3.3 These are detailed in the application planning report. However, a brief summary of key factors affecting my assessment is set out below.

Changes to the District Plan

- 3.4 Through the District Plan review, there has been a number of changes to the zoning pattern in the area (See **Attachment 2** showing distribution of zones). This includes:

- 1) The Arrowtown Golf Course is now zoned Community Purpose;
- 2) An area to the south of the Residential Arrowtown Historic zone has been zoned Medium Density Residential;
- 3) Land off Jopp St has been included within the UGB and zoned Low Density Suburban Residential; and
- 4) Land on the western side of McDonnell Road comprises a mix of zones including Wakatipu Basin Rural Amenity zone (with a minimum lot size of 80 hectares); Wakatipu Basin Lifestyle Precinct; and the Hills Resort zone.

- 3.5 The Hills Resort zone extends over an extensive area between McDonnell Road and Arrowtown-Lake Hayes Road. The purpose of the zone is described as enabling high quality on-site visitor activities and resort facilities in a golf course setting and with a predominance of open space. The zone provides for golf courses, a sculpture park, walkways and cycleway, visitor industry activities, residential activities, and a small-scale commercial centre. A range of forms of visitor accommodation are anticipated in the zone, including boutique hotels/lodges with associated visitor amenities (including cafés and restaurants and facilities for health and wellness) and units that are primarily available for short-term visitor stays.

New Legislation – National Policy Statement on Urban Development

- 3.6 The National Policy Statement on Urban Development (NPS-UD) was released in July 2020. The NPS-UD seeks to ensure New Zealand’s towns and cities are well-functioning urban environments that meet the changing needs of our diverse communities. It seeks to remove overly restrictive barriers to development to allow growth ‘up’ and ‘out’ in locations that have good access to existing services, public transport networks, and infrastructure.
- 3.7 Objective 4 of the NPS notes that “New Zealand’s urban environments, including their amenity values, develop and change over time in response to the diverse and changing needs of people, communities and future generations.”

Residential Demand – Growth in Area

- 3.8 As set out in the Economics Assessment by Formative, the Queenstown Lakes District has experienced rapid population growth over the past 20 years. The assessment finds that demand projections calculated by QLDC in 2018 underestimated the demand that has occurred. The report notes that while QLDC's updated Housing Capacity Assessment identifies a housing shortage in Arrowtown, it still relies on demand projections that are lower than consented growth. The report considers that the shortage of dwelling supply in Arrowtown is likely to be significantly larger than is reported in the Council's latest housing assessment.

Wakatipu Basin Land Use Planning Study

- 3.9 The Wakatipu Basin Land Use Planning Study (March 2017) (the "Basin Study") was commissioned by QLDC to respond to a number of queries by the Hearings Panel for the PDP. The assessment sought to identify the environmental characteristics and amenity values of the areas that should be maintained and enhanced, identify areas able to absorb development without adversely affecting the identified values, and identify those areas that are unable to absorb such development. Finally, it sought to determine whether there is any capacity for further development in the Wakatipu Basin floor and, if there is, where it should be located and what form it should take.
- 3.10 The report provides a comprehensive analysis of the character and amenity values of the Basin and the differences in different location, with a strong emphasis on landscape values. The report mapped a series of Landscape Character Units ("LCU") across the Basin. The Site is located in LCU 24. The analysis found that this LCU had a high absorption capability and recommended the creation of a South Arrowtown Precinct. The recommendations for the Arrowtown Precinct noted that this may achieve a density of development at the same level as the PDP's Low or Medium Density Residential zones (1:450m² and/or 1:250m²) and that the Precinct would require the integration of a clearly defensible urban edge, and assume an 'urban parkland' development character.

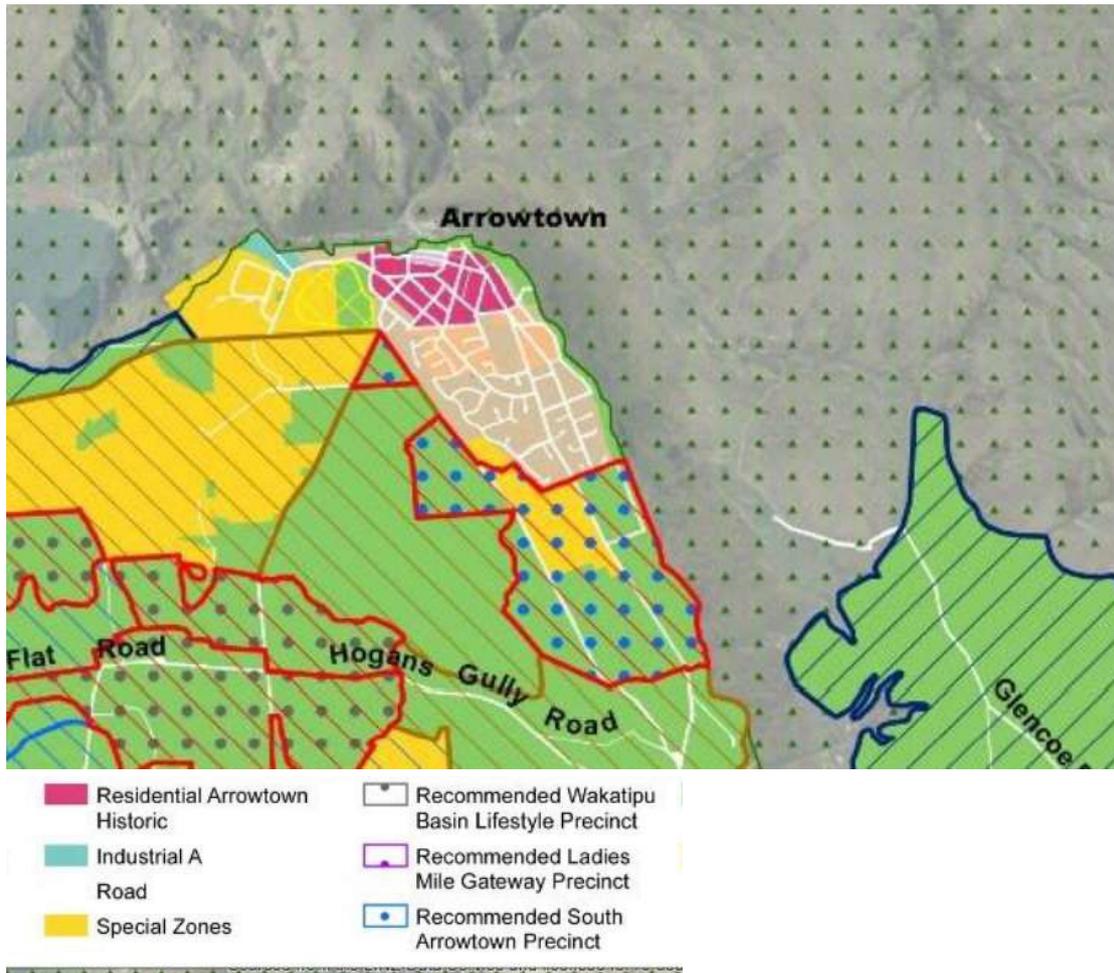


Figure 1: Excerpt from Figure 1 of the Basin Study

Development in Area

- 3.11 The most significant change to the development pattern in the area has been the establishment of the Arrowtown Lifestyle Village, a retirement village located on the western side of McDonnell Road, opposite the Site. The village has been comprehensively designed and contains a collection of recently constructed, closely spaced, single-level villas (see **Figures 2** and **3** below). Further stages, including a residents' lodge and apartments, are also planned.



Figure 2: Establishing Arrowtown Lifestyle Village viewed from elevated area of Site



Figure 3: Dwellings within Village

- 3.12 Within the Arrowtown South zone, the area of land zoned Low Density Residential adjacent to McDonnell Road has been developed in accordance with the zone provisions.
- 3.13 There has been some residential expansion at the north western margin of Arrowtown, off Manse Road.

4 Urban Design Assessment – Appropriateness of Residential Expansion

- 4.1 The Proposal is depicted in the concept plans prepared by Baxter Design. It makes provision for approximately 100 residential sites of varying scale to accommodate different housing typologies. The clusters of residential lots are configured around a network of open spaces that respond to key landscape features. The street network is legible, enhances connectivity between established streets and will be complemented with walking trails.

Efficiency of Settlement Growth

- 4.2 With the projected demand for residential growth set out in the economic analysis and the shortfall in capacity within the existing settlement of Arrowtown, I consider the Site is well located to accommodate an expansion of residential use as proposed. In my opinion, the current zone provisions that enable development of the land to create a low-density, rural 'lifestyle' residential environment represents an inefficient use of the land resource. If developed in accordance with the zone provisions, the subdivision pattern would place constraints on creating a future suitable urban structure, if and when urban expansion of the settlement is deemed appropriate. In particular, the opportunity to achieve good street and pedestrian connectivity may be lost. Fragmented land tenure would also limit the potential to achieve a co-ordinated development response on the land.

Access to Local Employment, Services and Amenities

- 4.3 Arrowtown is a well-established settlement that contains a broad range of employment, services, and amenities. Many of these are concentrated in the town centre, while the wider settlement contains a full range of community amenities, including library, churches, school, and recreational opportunities and facilities. In particular, the Arrowtown Primary School is located a short distance (around 350m from the northern end of the Site along Centennial Avenue) from the Site.
- 4.4 This access to a range of employment, services, and amenities has transport implications, with the opportunity for many daily trips to be made locally; and opportunities for walking and cycling local trips reducing potential traffic generation.

The Transport Assessment also notes that a logical extension to the existing Arrowtown bus route could be made to provide a stop within the Site.

- 4.5 A resource consent has been granted to establish a function venue in and around the historic woolshed, accessed from McDonnell Road. Restoration of the woolshed is currently underway. The subdivision layout and particularly the main spine road responds to the location of this facility and the historic Muter Homestead, passing between the two.

Residential Amenity

- 4.6 Easy access to a range of established employment, services, and amenities will contribute to the amenity of the neighbourhood for residents. Unlike many 'greenfield' residential development areas, where these amenities can take a considerable time to establish, the Site is well located as an extension of a fully established urban environment, to take advantages of the amenity this provides. New residents can form ties with an established community network.
- 4.7 A key feature of the proposed neighbourhood layout is the establishment of a public realm that provides good connectivity though the Site, both vehicular and active mode. The main spine road will provide a connection between McDonnell Road and Centennial Avenue, improving connectivity for the wider Arrowtown settlement. Pedestrian walkways will provide additional connectivity and recreational amenity for residents.
- 4.8 The development proposal responds to the characteristics of the land and respects the open space areas defined in the Arrowtown South zone to be kept free from buildings and ecologically restored. The considerably varied topography of the land provides the opportunity for house sites with differing aspects, outlook, and character. The neighbourhood layout responds to the topography with street connections following the contours of the land, particularly the primary street connection between McDonnell Road and Centennial Avenue.
- 4.9 The proposed neighbourhood layout respects and responds to the historic heritage item on the site, the Muter Farm homestead (Category 3 protection, Item 126) and the associated stone stable. With the establishment of a function venue at the stables these elements of built heritage will provide a neighbourhood focus and contribute positively to the neighbourhood character.
- 4.10 The restored ponds at the base of the escarpment will provide a distinctive natural amenity for dwellings at their margins and the wider neighbourhood.
- 4.11 The development proposal includes sites that will enable a range of dwelling typologies and densities (as depicted in the masterplan by Baxter Design), configured in response to the underlying topography and the character of the wider context. This will contribute to housing diversity and choice within the Arrowtown settlement.

- 4.12 Overall, I consider the Proposal will provide good amenity for residents and will contribute to the expansion of Arrowtown in a manner that provides a well-functioning urban environment.

Urban Boundary

- 4.13 As set out in Section 3 above, there have been a number of significant changes to the planning framework and physical environment since the Environment Court's determinations in 2013 regarding the location of the urban growth boundary and the suitability of the Site to accommodate urban growth.
- 4.14 The more recent Basin Study was carried out with consideration of these relevant matters and identified the Site as being within an area that is suitable to accommodate urban growth. It recommended the creation of an Arrowtown Precinct, suggesting that it may be suitable to achieve a density of development at the same level as the PDP's Low or Medium Density Residential zones (1:450m² and/or 1:250m²). From an urban design perspective, I agree with that recommendation.
- 4.15 The Basin Study recommended a fine-grained consideration of a range of matters to be progressed through a structure planning process. It identified the need to define a clearly defensible urban edge and assumed an 'urban parkland' type development character.
- 4.16 In my opinion, the proposed neighbourhood layout has been designed in response to a clear analysis of the Site's characteristics and relationship to the surrounding context. Proceeding with development of the Site prior to structure planning of the wider Precinct will not, in my view, inhibit the ability to achieve a suitable structure plan for the broader area. I note that the area of the Site fronting McDonnell Road has been kept free from development as it is currently prohibited under the Arrowtown South zone. The proposed neighbourhood layout has been designed to ensure that this area could be readily integrated through future planning for the wider area.
- 4.17 As noted above², in my opinion, if development were to proceed in accordance with the current Arrowtown South zone provisions, it would frustrate the ability to achieve the outcomes recommended in the Basin Study. The fragmentation of land would diminish the ability to take a comprehensive approach to development of the Site and may preclude the ability to achieve an appropriate urban structure.
- 4.18 In my assessment in 2009, I found that McDonnell Road and the Arrowtown Golf Course provided an edge that could define a defensible urban boundary. Since then,

² Para. 4.1

the context for considering an appropriate boundary to the settlement has changed with:

- 1) The establishment of the Arrowtown Lifestyle Village to the west of McDonnell Road;
- 2) Land off Jopp Street being zoned Low Density Suburban Residential (with a medium density comprehensive residential development proposed);
- 3) Creation of the Hills Resort zone to the west of McDonnell Road, with a range of activities enabled; and
- 4) Zoning of the Arrowtown Golf course as Community Purpose.

4.19 In the context of this broader land-use pattern and the recommendations in the Basin Study, the Site would not form an edge to the Arrowtown settlement. In my opinion, development of this land would not restrict the ability to define a wider defensible urban edge as recommended in the Basin Study.

Maintaining Arrowtown Character

4.20 As I identified in my 2009 assessment, Arrowtown has a distinctive character. Key features that contribute to the special character of the urban environment include: the settlement's relationship to its wider natural setting; the configuration and character of streets; vegetation; and the pattern of built development.

4.21 As defined in the Arrowtown Design Guidelines, expression of an historic character is concentrated on the Town Centre and the residential area immediately surrounding this (see **Figure 4** below). This is reflected in the zone structure that identifies the Arrowtown Town Centre zone and Arrowtown Residential Historic Management zone, and the application of special character provisions.

4.22 The more recent residential neighbourhoods, including the residential area that extends to the northern boundary of the Site, provide some contrast to that historic character; and the built environment reflects more contemporary residential neighbourhoods.

4.23 An area of land to the south of the Arrowtown Residential Historic Management zone is now zoned Medium Density Residential, enabling a greater density of residential activity that may result in increased change in character within the established area of Arrowtown.

4.24 The Proposal primarily relies on the subdivision design to ensure a neighbourhood character and amenity that reflects its Arrowtown context is created. This is achieved through the urban structure defined by the layout of streets and accessways and the lot layout that responds to the underlying topography, the provision of open spaces and the distribution of a range of lot sizes. The design of streets and open spaces will also contribute to the amenity and character of the neighbourhood.

- 4.25 A number of dwelling design controls are also proposed. These will be imposed as consent notices on the lot titles. The controls provide a balance between ensuring a suitable character and amenity is created, while enabling the development of a range of housing typologies and limiting ongoing design and compliance costs for future owners. Section 4.8 of the Arrowtown Design Guidelines will also be provided with all sale and purchase agreements to provide additional guidance on how the Arrowtown vernacular can be achieved.
- 4.26 Given the greater complexity in ensuring appropriate design outcomes are achieved for higher density outcomes (as required on lots 56 – 58, 61-63, 64-66, 75-82 and 90-92), a further design review process will be required for development of these lots.
- 4.27 Centennial Avenue and, to a lesser extent, McDonnell Road provide the southern arrival points to the Arrowtown settlement. In my opinion, the development concept proposed will provide a suitable extension to the existing urban environment and will improve the arrival experience, integrating well with the established pattern of development further to the north.
- 4.28 In relation to the Centennial Avenue frontage, a generous setback of buildings with planting of front yards and pockets of open space is proposed and will enable a generously planted frontage to the street, creating a strongly vegetated arrival experience. The fencing and planting of the frontage of these lots will be undertaken as part of the subdivision and a requirement for their maintenance in perpetuity will be included in the title consent notices.
- 4.29 In relation to McDonnell Road, residential lots will have a generous set-back from the street front. Revegetation of the escarpment will enhance the role of this natural feature as a structuring element within the neighbourhood. The alignment of the main spine road through the neighbourhood to pass between the historic Muter Homestead and the restored stables will celebrate these historic features as part of the urban environment, adding visual richness and a link to the area's past.
- 4.30 Overall, I consider the development concept will create an 'urban parkland' environment, as suggested as suitable in the Basin study, and will make a positive contribution to the overall character of Arrowtown as it expands to meet the contemporary living requirements of local residents.

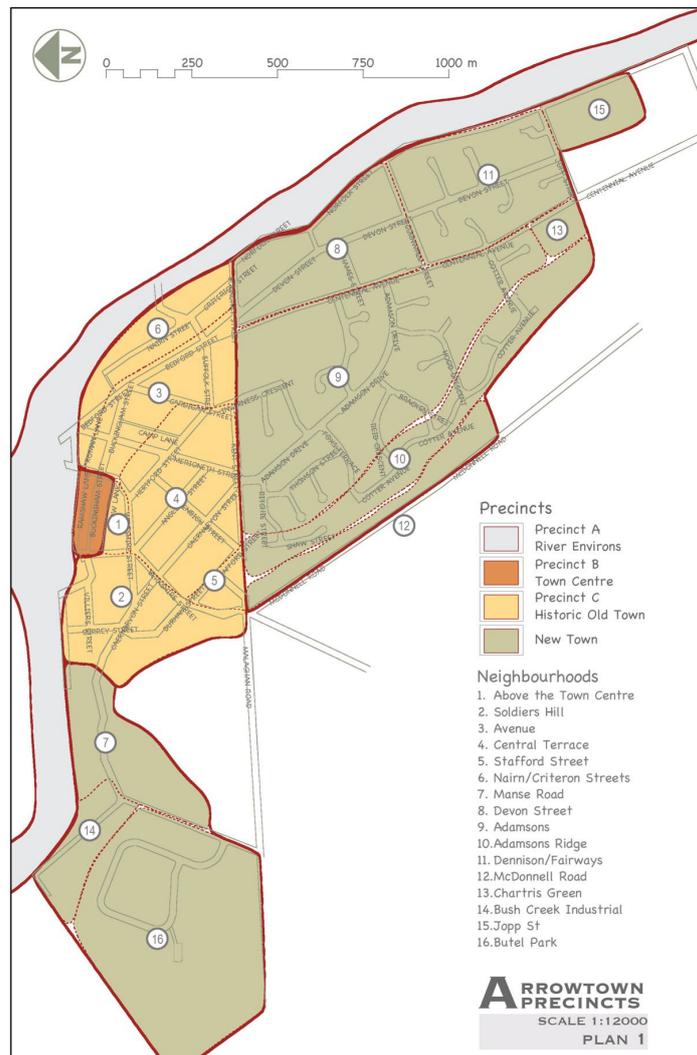


Figure 4: Precinct Plan from Arrowtown Guidelines, p.1-2

Operative District Plan Framework

- 4.31 As previously noted, the Site is within the Arrowtown South Special zone of the Operative District Plan.
- 4.32 The explanation for the zone notes that:

The southern edge of the settlement is part of the wider visual amenity setting of the Wakatipu Basin; however there is the opportunity to create a cluster of special living environments that have high amenity and that contribute to the overall character of the settlement. It is important that development occurs in conjunction with the protection and enhancement of the natural features (the Escarpment and Watercourse).

- 4.33 The objectives for the zone are:
1. *To provide for a range of residential and rural living activities in a way and at a rate that ensures a comprehensive and sustainable pattern of development is achieved.*
 2. *To manage and enhance the biodiversity values, physical features, landscape and amenity values of the Zone³.*
- 4.34 These are supported by a number of detailed policies. The zone utilises a structure plan to spatially identify development areas and house locations within the zone. While the proposed subdivision achieves a higher intensity of development than anticipated for the zone, I consider it is consistent with the policy framework in a number of key respects. As set out in my analysis above, I consider the proposed subdivision has been designed in response to the key characteristics of the land and its context and will provide for a range of residential activities in a way that ensures a comprehensive and sustainable pattern of development is achieved.
- 4.35 As shown in the ODP Structure Plan Overlay plan the proposed subdivision layout avoids the key areas of open space identified in the Structure Plan including the important landscape features of the escarpment and wetlands (both constructed and natural). The subdivision configuration responds positively to these open space elements to create an open space network that will contribute positively to the neighbourhood's amenity and to the creation of a distinctive sense of place that is compatible with the established character of the wider settlement of Arrowtown. In my opinion, the proposal demonstrates high quality urban design.
- 4.36 In my opinion the Proposal is inconsistent with the policies that are directed to creating a rural amenity and character, particularly Policy 2.4.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 Arrowtown is a settlement with a long and rich history that has evolved and grown over time to respond to its changing functions and the needs of its community.
- 5.2 In 2009 I carried out an urban design assessment that determined that urban growth could be accommodated to the south of the existing urban area, including the Site, in a manner that respects the existing settlement pattern and contributes positively to its evolution.
- 5.3 Economic analysis demonstrates that capacity for the strong demand for residential growth in the Arrowtown settlement is severely constrained. Since my earlier assessment, there have been a number of significant changes to both the physical environment surrounding the Site and the relevant planning framework. Having

³ Ibid, 12.31.4.

considered this context, it is my opinion that the role of the Site and its suitability to accommodate residential expansion of the settlement is reinforced.

- 5.4 In my opinion, the development concept proposed represents an efficient use of a limited land resource. It will meet the urban design principles that I identified for the land in relation to the earlier Plan Change request. In my opinion, the Proposal will contribute positively to the creation of a well-functioning urban environment, and while not wholly consistent with the policy framework for the Arrowtown South Special zone as it relates to the residential density enabled, the design and layout of the proposed subdivision is consistent with the key spatial outcomes sought.



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PHOTOGRAPH 1: Site viewed from McDonnell Road



PHOTOGRAPH 2: Wetland at base of escarpment



PHOTOGRAPH 3: Significant trees immediately to the south of the Site



PHOTOGRAPH 4: Historic cottage



PHOTOGRAPH 5: Stone stables prior to restoration

